

Aberdeen and the Church in the Highlands

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When Dr Kennedy wrote his celebrated account of Highland church life first published in 1860 as *The Days of the Fathers in Ross-shire*, he claimed that religious life in Ross-shire had been shaped for more than 200 years by Ross-shire ministers who were unaffected by outside influences. Of course, being himself a graduate of King's College he probably did not think of Aberdeen and its universities as being an outside influence. Perhaps with a fondness for a cricketing analogy – a sport in which he had a life-long interest – Kennedy named eleven ministers as having been the most effective agents in promoting the spiritual life of Ross-shire during these two centuries. According to Kennedy these were men “whose names tower above those of all others, and to whom by universal consent, the first place would be given”.¹ Kennedy's “select” had all been trained in Aberdeen.²

Another striking example of the contribution of Aberdeen students to the religious prosperity of the Highlands is to be found in the Moderatorial address given by Dr Gustavus Aird to the Free Church General Assembly which met in Inverness in 1888. In the course of his address on *The Progress of Evangelical Religion in the Highlands* Aird mentioned those ministers who, in his view, had made a signal contribution to that prosperity. In an abbreviated account of his address published in the Memorial Volume of the Inverness Assembly, only eight of the thirty-one names mentioned by Aird, are listed; but all of these eight, being, presumably, the most illustrious of the ministers, were Aberdeen graduates. The full text of the address is

¹ J. Kennedy, *The Days of the Fathers in Ross-shire* (Edinburgh, 1861), 19.

² Kennedy's “eleven” were: Thomas Hog of Kiltarn, John Mackilligan of Alness, James Fraser of Alness, John Porteous of Kilmuir, Hector Macphail of Resolis, Charles Calder of Ferintosh, Lachlan Mackenzie of Lochcarron, Alexander Macadam of Nigg, William Forbes of Tarbat, and John Macdonald of Ferintosh. J. Kennedy, *Days of the Fathers*, 17.

given in an appendix to Aird's biography.³ Of the thirty-one names listed (or thirty-two if we include Aird himself, as is his due), twenty-five had been trained in Aberdeen.

Since the purpose of a university is to develop the skills and influence the attitudes of its licentiates, it may be assumed that training in Aberdeen was a formative influence on its graduates in divinity. Today the Highland church is viewed by many historians as having been under the influence of Edinburgh – the centre of the church's administrative machinery. The purpose of this paper is to draw attention to the role of Aberdeen as a centre of influence on the church in the Highlands, a theme that has recently been alluded to in an essay on Aberdeen's distinctive theological tradition.⁴

In the conclusion to a wide-ranging account of Highland church life from 1690 to 1900, Douglas Ansdell stressed the influence of external forces on the development of the Highland church. Throughout that momentous period he discerned a cyclical process in which first, presbyterianism (1690-1730), then, evangelicalism (1790-1830) and finally, liberalism, each originating largely from outwith the region, interacted with indigenous features to determine the subsequent structure and character of the Highland church.⁵ These three sequences offer a useful division for noting some east-coast contributions to events and forces which shaped the church's life.

The evidence for Aberdeen's involvement in the Highland church at all stages of its development is considerable. Indeed the case for an east coast component at an early stage is evidenced by the fact that the introduction of the afore-mentioned features – presbyterianism,

³ Of the names listed, one, (Dr Stewart of Dingwall) can be identified with St Andrews; three can be identified with Edinburgh (John Shaw of Bracadale, Dr Ross of Lochbroom and George Macleod also of Lochbroom), three can be identified with Glasgow (Neil McBride of Arran, Duncan Matheson of Knock and Finlay Cook of Reay) while the remaining twenty-five were all trained in Aberdeen. A. Macrae, *The Life of Gustavus Aird* (Stirling, 1908), 266-270.

⁴ Ian Bradley, "Study Rooted in Devotion - the Aberdeen Theological Tradition" in *But Where Shall Wisdom be Found?*, ed. Alan Main (Aberdeen, 1995), 44-53.

⁵ Douglas Ansdell, *The People of the Great Faith. The Highland Church 1690-1900* (Stornoway, 1998), 212-214.

evangelicalism and liberalism – all emerged from a prior event, the arrival of the New Testament in the English language. As early as 1526, copies of Tyndale's *New Testament* had found their way into Scotland through the ports of St Andrews, Dundee and Aberdeen.⁶ At the same time people in Aberdeen also possessed books written by the Reformers on the continent.⁷ It was not until 1633, or later, that Bibles began to be printed in Scotland and so, for more than a century after the first copies had been smuggled in via the east coast ports, Scotland was dependent, not on England, but on continental trade, for its supply of Bibles.⁸ But even before 1633, Aberdeen had exerted an influence on the Scottish Church through Wm. Elphinstone (1431-1514) who was consecrated Bishop of Aberdeen in 1488. He founded the University in 1495 and as a churchman he had no equal in 15th century Scotland.⁹

The triumph of presbyterianism

In the presbyterianising of the Highlands, the key element in the north and the north-west is said to have been the southern influence¹⁰ but this needs to be qualified with respect to the northern and eastern Highlands. The first Presbyterian minister to be settled on the north coast was Alexander Munro, a convert of Robert Bruce during Bruce's second exile in Inverness (1622-24). Following his conversion, Munro enrolled at the University of Aberdeen. In 1634 he was ordained to the parish of Durness. There he was "the honoured means whereby a large harvest of souls was gathered in to Christ". In the course of his ministry to a people who did not have access to the written Word, Munro used his poetic gifts to versify passages of Scripture in Gaelic and to compose hymns elucidating the doctrines of

⁶ C. Anderson, *The Annals of the English Bible* (London, 1845), vol. 2, 410.

⁷ G. D. Henderson, *The Church of Scotland. A short history* (Edinburgh, 1939), 42-43.

⁸ C. Anderson, *Annals of the English Bible*, 533.

⁹ L. J. Macfarlane in *Dictionary of Scottish Church History & Theology*, ed. Nigel M de S Cameron *et al.* (Edinburgh, 1993), 289.

¹⁰ C. G. Brown, *Religion and Society in Scotland since 1707* (Edinburgh, 1997), 91.

the faith.¹¹ The people learned to sing their faith. In adopting this means of indoctrination, Munro introduced a novel and effective teaching method in which he was to be followed by many other notable practitioners.¹²

In the northern Highlands the re-imposition of Episcopacy in 1660 was subject to considerable local resistance. In Easter Ross, Inverness, Nairnshire and Moray, many of the landed proprietors were condemned and fined for their refusal to repudiate the deposed Presbyterian ministers.¹³ Because of this underground resistance to Episcopacy, when the Scottish Parliament decreed the restoration of Presbytery in 1690, the eastern Highlands had much less need for the intervention of southern agencies to assist in the process. The northern counties had their own Covenanters, men who had “lived, and laboured or suffered, north of the Grampians”.¹⁴

From the commencement of the Reformation in the Highlands there was an east coast influence, several of the feudal barons of Sutherland and Easter Ross having given their support to the Protestant religion. Among them was Munro of Fowlis whose “godly example and efforts must have tended not a little to recommend and propagate evangelical principles and practice in the locality”.¹⁵ The locality in question was Tain where Thomas Hog was born in 1628. Of Hog it has been said that “more than any other single man, he has left his impress on the religion of the northern Highlands”.¹⁶ Habits that were to influence Hog’s trend-setting ministry were formed while he was a student at Marischal College. Instead of resorting to Aberdeen’s hostelries for companionship “it was his practice to invite the better disposed among his theological classmates to his private lodging for the purpose of engaging them in devotional and other exercises

¹¹ A. Gunn & J. Mackay, *Sutherland and the Reay Country* (Glasgow, 1897), 335.

¹² J. MacInnes, *The Evangelical Movement in the Highlands of Scotland 1688 to 1800* (Aberdeen, 1951), 262-294.

¹³ M. Macdonald, *The Covenanters in Moray and Ross* (Inverness, 1892), 91-92.

¹⁴ R. King, *The Covenanters in the North* (Aberdeen, 1846), 4.

¹⁵ *The Banished Minister; or Scenes in the Life of Thomas Hog of Kiltearn* (Edinburgh, 1872), 5.

¹⁶ W. Taylor, “A Sketch of the Religious History of the Northern Highlands of Scotland” in *Memorials of C. C. Mackintosh* (Edinburgh, 1870), 4.

proper to them, alike as Christians and aspirants to the gospel ministry".¹⁷ Subsequently, under Hog's oversight, the practice of encouraging the formation of social or fellowship meetings for prayer and mutual edification was widely adopted in the northern counties. "In every parish where an awakening took place, the minister, after the example of Thomas Hog, formed the converts and the earnest enquirers into a fellowship society that used to meet at regular intervals under his own presidency, to confer on points of Christian experience".¹⁸ Following the example of Hog, John Balfour, under whose ministry a revival took place at Nigg from 1730, commenced ten prayer societies in his parish.¹⁹ The conferences on Christian experience instituted by Hog were the precursors of the later and more exclusive fellowship meetings convened by "The Men", a group who constituted a self-appointed elite in the Northern Highlands. These private fellowship meetings in turn gave rise to the public "Question Meetings" which soon became a prominent and popular feature in the Highland communion.²⁰ The devotional practices instituted by Thomas Hog in Aberdeen, he later urged on his Ross-shire parishioners with the result that "Kiltearn adopted family worship in every home and the voice of praise and prayer rose from baronial hall and humble cottage".²¹

Another area in which Hog may well have influenced the practice of the Highland church, is in respect of admission to the sacraments. He was guarded in his response to requests for baptism and he exercised even greater strictness in admitting applicants to the Lord's Table. For some years after he was settled at Kiltearn he refused to dispense the sacrament.²² MacInnes ascribes the characteristic features of the Highland communion – awe of

¹⁷ *The Banished Minister*, 10.

¹⁸ Taylor, *Religious History*, 14-15.

¹⁹ *Religious Life in Scotland: From the Reformation to the Present Day*, ed. N. L. Walker (London, 1888), 124-125.

²⁰ D. Meek in *Dictionary of Scottish Church History & Theology*, ed. Nigel M de S Cameron (Edinburgh, 1993), 558-9.

²¹ N. C. Macfarlane, *The "Men" of the Lews* (Stormoway, 1924) xiv.

²² Stevenson's *Memoirs of the Life of Thomas Hog*, in, *Memoirs of Mrs Wm Veitch etc.* (Edinburgh, 1846), 95.

the sacrament and stringency in admission – to Hog’s ministry at Kiltearn.²³ The reluctance of men, even down to the present day, to become communicant members in the Highland church because of the perceived requirement for male members to participate in public prayer, may also have originated in Hog’s demanding standards.

According to the same authority, the formative influences moulding the distinctive piety of the Highland church, were, firstly, the teaching and practice of Thomas Hog and, secondly, the republication in 1718 of the book entitled the *Marrow of Modern Divinity*.²⁴ These influences would seem to be separated by at least one if not two generations because the *Marrow* although it had been published in England in 1645, only came to prominence in Scotland in 1718 after its republication by James Hog of Fife (no relative of Thomas Hog). Yet it is not without interest that a copy of the 1645 edition of the *Marrow* is included in the library that belonged to the Scougalls, Patrick, Bishop of Aberdeen and Chancellor of King’s College (1664-1682) and his son Henry, Professor of Divinity at King’s College (1674-1678), indicating that the book and therefore its teaching was known in Aberdeen during Thomas Hog’s life-time. Perhaps the gap between Thomas Hog and *The Marrow* is not so distant as at first appears.

The teaching and practice of Henry Scougall (1650-1678) is itself one of the major sources of Aberdeen’s influence on the ministry of the Highland church. In his writings, especially his devotional classic *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*, Scougall left a legacy that proved to be of lasting value to the whole church. His tenure of the Divinity Chair at King’s College was tragically brief, just four years from 1674 to 1678, but even in that short time he left the impress of his own spirituality on the students. G D Henderson remarks that at King’s College, Scougall functioned not just as a teacher but as a spiritual director who taught his students that their role as ministers was not simply to indoctrinate but to guide men’s souls to eternity.²⁵ Scougall, like Hog, seems to have encouraged student meetings

²³ J. MacInnes, *Evangelical Movement*, 190.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 176.

²⁵ G. D. Henderson, *The Burning Bush. Studies in Scottish Church History* (Edinburgh, 1957), 102.

for fellowship and prayer. In the seventeenth century, the student body, which numbered about one hundred, lived in the college premises and it seems that it was Scougall's practice to gather them together on Sunday evening and speak to them of personal religion.²⁶ In addition, consequent either to his own initiative in convening a meeting intended for the deepening of spiritual life, or possibly in adapting one already formed, he was prevailed on to be its permanent president.²⁷ Butler suggests that these devotional meetings may have been the prototype for the Oxford prayer-societies that originated Methodism.²⁸ If Scougall through his writings and example influenced the Wesleys, Whitefield and the church in Oxford, there can be little doubt that his practice was also adopted by his Scottish students.

Scougall's life was so short that he had little opportunity to influence even one generation of students other than by his writings. But it is not without interest that his four-year professoriate coincided with the student years of John Fraser of Pitcalzian (1658-1711), minister of Alness from 1695-1711. Fraser endured much cruelty and hardship in the Covenanting cause, being imprisoned in the bottle dungeon at Dunottar and then banished to New England on account of his opposition to episcopacy under Charles II. Following the Revolution Settlement, he took the charge of Alness. His, we are told, was "a life of great vicissitude and suffering in the early part of it, and much usefulness in the latter part".²⁹ Prominent in his usefulness was his concern for neighbouring pastorless congregations, a concern which prompted him to go "from place to place unwearied, holding meetings and preaching". His fondness for holding meetings recalls Scougall's example to his students.

Fraser's son, James Fraser of Pitcalzian (1695-1769) who had also been educated at King's College, succeeded his father as minister of Alness in 1726. Although he had not benefited, as his father had, from Scougall's vibrant presence at King's College, we can be confident that he was as

²⁶ George Garden, *A sermon preached at the funeral of the Rev. Henry Scougall, A.M.* included in *The Works of the Rev. H Scougall* (London, 1818), 253.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 251.

²⁸ D. Butler, *Henry Scougall and the Oxford Methodists* (Edinburgh, 1899), viii.

²⁹ J. Noble, *Religious Life in Ross* (Edinburgh, 1909), 44.

familiar with *The Life of God in the Soul of Man* as he was with other Biblical and theological writings of his own time and earlier times.³⁰ Like Scougall, Fraser was a scholar who was to leave his mark on the Church not just in Scotland but in Europe and America through his writings, in his case by his classic work on *The Scripture Doctrine of Sanctification*. The evangelical religion of the Highlands in his time was based on the belief that it is possible for the individual soul to know God personally as God, and Fraser in his treatise made practical application of that doctrine as had Scougall before him. Scougall indeed gave such emphasis to his longing for intimate communion with God that some have claimed him as a mystic. While the Church of Scotland officially repudiated Bourignonism, some Highland ministers such as James Calder of Croy, following the style of Scougall, expressed their ardent longings for communion with Christ in language that was consonant with mysticism.³¹

Students are open to influences not only from the classroom but also from the pulpit. Never was this more true than in the seventeenth century when the power of the pulpit was supreme. At the beginning of the century, Aberdeen had but one parish church, the collegiate charge of St Nicholas. Students from Marischal College worshipped either there or at Greyfriars Church which was linked with St Nicholas and supplied by its ministers. At Old Aberdeen the parish church for King's College was St Machar's. In 1625 Alex Scroggie, minister of St Machar's, and James Sibbald, minister of West St Nicholas, were both in the group known as "The Aberdeen Doctors". These men opposed the National Covenant of 1638 claiming that church government, be it by episcopacy or presbytery, was a matter of secondary importance. Their hour in history co-incided with Samuel Rutherford's exile in Aberdeen and although Rutherford denounced them as Arminians, they strenuously denied the charge.³² Sibbald's theology was the most suspect of the group but for the most part the doctors were

³⁰ J. MacInnes, *Evangelical Movement*, 70.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 168.

³² G. D. Henderson, *The Church of Scotland*, 86-88. See also J. Macleod (*Scottish Theology*, Edinburgh, 1946, 65) who exonerates the Aberdeen Doctors John Forbes and Robert Baron from the accusation.

orthodox theologians and opposition to them was based not so much on their learning, which was impressive, or their theology, which was Calvinistic, but on their refusal to sign the Covenants. About a score of the students attending King's College between 1619 and 1644 became ministers of Highland charges but in so far as they were influenced by the teaching or preaching of the Aberdeen Doctors, it was in ways which cannot easily be traced. And, doubtless there were counterbalancing influences such as Rutherford himself. Despite the fact that Aberdeen was chosen for Rutherford's exile because of its remoteness and lack of opportunity to influence others, he succeeded in making his voice heard in the town and university.

Even in the seventeenth century, the Aberdeen pulpits, few though they were, were not restricted to preachers of the stamp of the Aberdeen Doctors. The register of the ministers of the church of St Nicholas included men of impeccable orthodoxy and unswerving devotion to the Covenants such as Andrew Cant (1584-1663) "the most actively bigoted supporter of the Covenant in the north of Scotland".³³ Similarly in the eighteenth century, the ministers of St Nicholas included James Osburne, subsequently Professor of Divinity at Marischal and a strong defender of reformed doctrine, and James Ogilvie (1695-1776) a strict evangelical who assisted at the Kilsyth revival in 1742.³⁴ With Professor Simson arraigned for heresy in Glasgow and David Hume promoting scepticism in Edinburgh, Aberdeen in the opening decades of the eighteenth century could lay claim to being the champion of traditional orthodoxy. But its influence was not always viewed as beneficial to the Highland church.

The eighteenth century was the age of the Moderates when the teaching of divinity students in Aberdeen was entrusted to men of the eminence of George Campbell (1719-1796), Alexander Gerard (1728-1795) and James Beattie (1735-1803). The Highlands were not lacking in Moderate ministers, men such as Dr John Bethune of Dornoch (1746-1816), Dr Thomas Ross of Kilmonivaig (1747-1822) and Dr Alexander Downie of Lochalsh (1765-1820), who had studied under these teachers and who,

³³ *Fasti*, vol. vi, 37.

³⁴ N. L. Walker, *Religious Life*, 116.

perhaps, grew to share their outlook. But there were other Highland ministers who received their theological training at the hands of the Moderates and nevertheless retained evangelical sympathies even when challenged on that account. Alexander Macleod (1786-1869) of Uig fame and his fellow-countryman from Stoer, Norman Macleod of Waipu (1780-1866), were students together at King's College (1808-1812) where they "formed a society in which they bound themselves to resist the influence of Moderates among students and professors".³⁵ Norman's resistance was such that he found himself rusticated but his companions, "though equally orthodox, were less sweeping in their discourses which were sustained, and as they were let through, they did not see their way to sever their connection with the church".

The turning point in the reign of the Moderates is usually identified with the year 1805 when John Leslie (1766-1832), was appointed with the support of the Evangelicals to the Chair of Mathematics and Natural Philosophy at the University of Edinburgh. However, Moderate teaching continued to predominate in the Divinity Halls into the nineteenth century, and although Aberdeen's divinity school held to Calvinistic orthodoxy to a greater extent than did the other Scottish universities, its students were not insulated from Moderate thinking. Consequently those who opposed the ways of the Moderates, were not slow to lay the ills of the church at the door of the divinity halls. Alexander Auld was of the opinion that Moderate teaching in Aberdeen had left its mark on Highland pulpits. "At the Divinity Hall of Aberdeen in those days the example set before young men and the instruction imparted to them were little fitted to profit them.... Of the influence of this teaching and of the mould into which it cast men, we have examples in the Strathbogie ministers of Disruption time".³⁶ But these examples were limited in number.

³⁵ D. Munro, *Records of Grace in Sutherland* (Edinburgh, 1953), 187.

³⁶ A. Auld, *Ministers and Men in the Far North* (Wick, 1868, reprinted 1956), 30.

The advance of evangelicalism

The advance of Highland evangelicalism in the early nineteenth century has been attributed to two distinct sources,³⁷ one based in Easter Ross and effectively free from extraneous influences, the other distinctly southern in its origin. The influence of this southern source has been stressed in a very readable account of evangelical religion in Gaelic Scotland written by the Rev. John Mackay (1846-1918) one-time Free Church minister in Cromarty and latterly Highland Evangelist with the United Free Church. Mackay, in *The Church in the Highlands*, pinpointed the 1796 visit of Charles Simeon and the Haldane brothers to the Moulin Manse of the Rev. Alexander Stewart, as the commencement of a major spiritual quickening in the Highlands. "From that day the glens and straths that radiate from Moulin began to show first the blade, then the ear, till the full corn in the ear was reaped in the joyful harvest of the Moulin Revival".³⁸ Although Stewart's own account of the Moulin Revival specifically mentioned only Simeon's contribution,³⁹ Mackay, accepting the Haldane emphasis as given by James Haldane's nephew in his account of the visit,⁴⁰ went on to link the Moulin Revival with the Haldanes and the formation of The Society for Propagating the Gospel at Home, thus attributing Highland evangelicalism to Lowland Mission.

The alternative view that Highland evangelicalism was more heavily indebted to the evangelical piety of Easter Ross (and therefore to Aberdeen graduates), is borne out by reference to the agents involved in the spiritual awakening that affected the people in the Northern Highlands during the eighteenth century.⁴¹ It was under the ministry of local pastors that revivals occurred in places such as Nigg, Rosskeen, Golspie and Tongue and with

³⁷ D. Ansdell, *People of the Great Faith*, 52.

³⁸ J. Mackay, *The Church in the Highlands* (London, 1914), 225.

³⁹ J. Sievwright, *Memoirs of the Rev Alexander Stewart, D. D.* (Edinburgh, 1822),

94. See also Duncan, *History of Revivals of Religion in the British Isles Especially in Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1836), 307.

⁴⁰ A. Haldane, *The Lives of the Haldanes* (London, 3rd edition 1853), 139-141.

⁴¹ A. MacGillivray, *Sketches of Religion and Revivals of Religion in the North Highlands during the eighteenth century* (Glasgow, 1904).

such effect that it could be said, "The whole region was far in advance of the western and southern parts of the country in spiritual knowledge and experience".⁴² Caithness, however, was an exception. Throughout the greater part of the eighteenth century, unlike Easter Ross, Caithness had very largely become the territory of Moderates. There were occasional parishes such as Reay, under Alex Pope, or Halkirk, under John Sutherland, that enjoyed an evangelical ministry but when James Haldane visited Caithness in 1797, he found the state of religion in the county to be "most deplorable".⁴³

Haldane's brief ministry of six weeks won many converts resulting in the formation of congregational churches in Wick and Thurso but MacInnes asserts that the evangelicalism that flourished in Caithness between the time of the Haldanes' visit and the Disruption, was firmly rooted in the Presbyterian church and had no direct connection with Haldanism.⁴⁴ It was in fact the fruit of the ministries of John Munro (1768-1841) of Achreny and Halkirk, and Alex Gunn (1773-1836) of Watten. John Munro's first acquaintance with Aberdeen was not as a student but as a tradesman. After graduating from King's College in 1801 he was appointed to Achreny and while there he declined a call to the Aberdeen Gaelic Chapel where he had worshipped during his years in the city. Alex Gunn had also been a student in Aberdeen, completing his training in divinity alongside his contemporary James Kidd (1761-1834) whose influence is likely to have been more telling than that of Gunn's teachers.

Dr Kidd, in fact, was to be one of the major influences on the Highland church ministry. In 1794 he was appointed to the chair of Oriental Languages (Hebrew) at Marischal College, a position he continued to hold after his induction to Gilcomston Chapel-of-Ease in 1801. From then until his death in 1834 he exerted on Highland students a remarkable influence both as a teacher and as a preacher. Future Highland ministers such as Robert Finlayson (1793-1861) of Lochs and Helmsdale were regular worshippers at Gilcomston while studying in Aberdeen and, as an added

⁴² A. Macrae, *The Fire of God Among the Heather* (Inverness, nd), 88.

⁴³ A Haldane, *Lives of the Haldanes*, 176.

⁴⁴ J. MacInnes, *Evangelical Movement*, 147.

incentive for Highland students to worship at Gilcomston, Kidd made it his practice to invite ministers such as Macdonald of Ferintosh and Lewis Rose of Nigg to assist at his communion services.⁴⁵

Another major figure in the Highland church to be influenced by Kidd was Dr Gustavus Aird (1813-1898), a student at King's College from 1826 to 1830. His biographer wrote, "The deepest influence in young Aird's Aberdeen life seems to have been that of the well-known Dr Kidd... In common with other highland students, his heart was won by Dr Kidd's Celtic fire and religious fervour".⁴⁶ In his 1888 Moderatorial address on *The Progress of Evangelical Religion in the Highlands*, Dr Aird drew attention to the notable leadership given to revival in the Highlands by two Aberdeen graduates. Alex Macleod who graduated from King's College, Aberdeen in 1812 was prominent in the growth of the revival which commenced in Uig, Lewis circa 1822; and Roderick Macleod, an Aberdeen contemporary of Alex Macleod, was similarly associated with revival in Skye. In his survey of the progress of religion in the Highlands Dr Aird stressed that in referring to "religious prosperity" in relation to revival, he did not mean simply a willingness on the part of the people to be identified with having an interest in religion. Rather he conceived it as a genuine spiritual awakening, arousing in unregenerate souls a deep sense of sin and of the need for a Saviour, such that the whole community became aware of a spiritual force of unusual power at work in its midst. Such revivals have been a feature of Scottish church life at a local level since the Reformation. In the Highlands they have often been associated with communion seasons.⁴⁷ But, while many revivals have been on a localised scale, occasionally a major awakening took place, the effect of which was more widespread.

One such occurrence was the 1742 "work" at Cambuslang which, by attracting the attention of visiting clergy and laity, had a ripple effect on the church in other areas. Similarly, the repercussions of later revivals in central and lowland areas radiated outwards, allowing it to be said with some justification that "the broader distribution of Highland revivals in the first

⁴⁵ J. Martin, *Eminent Divines in Aberdeen and the North* (Aberdeen, 1888), 213.

⁴⁶ A. Macrae, *The Life of Gustavus Aird* (Stirling, 1908), 32-33.

⁴⁷ J. MacInnes, *Evangelical Movement*, 155.

half of the nineteenth century bears witness to a progressive penetration from the south".⁴⁸ However as Professor Meek has also noted, the epicentre of the 1859 nation-wide revival which came to be known as the Second Evangelical Awakening, was primarily in the east. In fact, the first recorded outbreak of this revival in Britain, was reported from Aberdeen towards the end of 1858.⁴⁹

The movement began with a visit of Reginald Radcliffe (1825-95), one of several lay-evangelists who held meetings in Aberdeen at the invitation of Principal David Brown, his colleague Prof. William Martin of Marischal College, and the Rev. James Smith, minister of the College Church. Brownlow North (1809-75) was also associated with the movement in the course of which he and Radcliffe were largely responsible for breaking down the long-standing prejudice against laymen entering the pulpits both of the Free Church and of the Established Church,⁵⁰ a development in keeping with the suggestion that the general tendency of revivals is to heighten the role of the laity at the expense of the clergy.⁵¹ The awakening that had its beginning in Aberdeen permeated to every corner of the land. In the northern Highlands the revival movement was in evidence from 1859⁵² and reached Skye in 1860. It was the third revival to occur in that island during the ministry of Roderick Macleod of Bracadale and Snizort.⁵³ Opposition to revival meetings in the Highlands was probably more evident in the later stages of the D L Moody campaign than it was in 1860. A contributor to a conference held in Aberdeen in 1910 to commemorate the jubilee of the Second Evangelical Awakening, wrote, "In the Highland

⁴⁸ D. E. Meek, "Gaelic Bible, revival and mission: the spiritual rebirth of the nineteenth-century Highlands" in *The Church in the Highlands*, ed. J. Kirk (Edinburgh, 1999), 119.

⁴⁹ J. Edwin Orr, *The Second Evangelical Awakening in Britain* (London, 1949), 59.

⁵⁰ R. Rainy and J. Mackenzie, *Life of William Cunningham, D.D.* (London, 1871), 420-22. J. Radcliffe, *Recollections of Reginald Radcliffe* (London, nd) 57-58.

⁵¹ D. E. Meek, "Gaelic Bible", 143.

⁵² J. Edwin Orr, *Second Evangelical Awakening*, 68.

⁵³ A. Macrae, *Revivals in the Highlands and Islands in the 19th Century* (Stirling, nd), 77.

parishes of the North and the North-West of Scotland, the ministers and the 'men' were so bitterly opposed to the Revival that they reviled it, until they understood it, and took it to their hearts, and in few places have there been more satisfactory results".⁵⁴

The emergence of Liberalism

The nineteenth-century evangelical ascendancy in the Church of Scotland culminated in the Disruption of 1843. Ten years earlier two critical General Assembly enactments, the Veto Act and the Chapels Act, had paved the way for this cataclysmic event. Although the Veto Act subsequently occupied more of the legal limelight, Francis Lyall has argued that the 1834 Chapels Act which widened ministerial eligibility for Assembly membership, was the more innovative and significant of the two.⁵⁵ The demand for a broadening of Assembly representation so as to include ministers from Chapels of Ease, was especially vocal in Aberdeen and, both in the inception and in the ratification of the Chapels Act, the leading role was played by Aberdeen's ministers notably Andrew Gray of Woodside.⁵⁶ The passage of this Act allowed the ministers of *quoad sacra* parishes, and ministers of highland Parliamentary Churches, parity in the church courts with the ministers of *quoad omnia* charges. In so doing, it significantly shifted the balance of power in the Assembly in favour of the Evangelicals and it significantly increased the representation of the highland church in the General Assembly.

It is perhaps surprising that the Disruption gained such widespread support in the highlands. Generally speaking, the highland ministers were not given to impulsive support of dissenting tendencies. According to Evander Maciver, John Macdonald, the Apostle of the North, "was at first strongly opposed to the Disruption, but he went to Edinburgh and was got

⁵⁴ *Reminiscences of the Revival of '59 and the Sixties* (Aberdeen, 1910), xviii.

⁵⁵ F. Lyall, *Of Presbyters and Kings* (Aberdeen, 1980), 29.

⁵⁶ *The progress of the chapel question from its first discussion in 1825 to its settlement in 1834 by the elevation of the ministers of chapels to the rank of the parochial clergy*, ed. A. Gray (Aberdeen, 1836).

round by the leading men there”.⁵⁷ This, doubtless, was a reference to the Convocation held in Edinburgh on 17 November 1842 at which John Macdonald of Ferintosh, was given a position on the platform. There is no published evidence to support the claim that he was leaned on by Chalmers, or by any of the Convocation leaders, to conform with their radical proposals. But it is true that Dr Begg of Newington, who voiced some reluctance to sever the State connection, was subjected to “intense pressure verging on moral blackmail”⁵⁸ before he consented to make the Convocation proposals unanimous.

The hesitation in relation to abandoning the Establishment which highland ministers might have felt on constitutional grounds, would not have been diminished by a consideration of the formidable financial problems that would confront a new denomination dependent on the voluntary givings of the people. In that connection, the support of the city ministers and their affluent congregations was vital; and so the example of Aberdeen with 100% of its ministers joining the Free Church as against 73% in Glasgow, 68% in Edinburgh and 64% in Dundee,⁵⁹ would have been a considerable encouragement to clerical waverers. When the Disruption eventually occurred, there was a considerable disparity between highland ministers and their people in transferring their allegiance to the Free Church. Over the highlands as a whole, about 50% of the ministers joined the Free Church but 90% of the people. In the Western Isles, only 20% of the ministers left the Established Church. In this respect, it was the laity rather than the ministers that determined the ecclesiastical geography of the highland landscape.

It is in relation to the latter half of the nineteenth century that we find most frequent reference to *southern* influences agitating the Highlands. This had to do both with the revivalist campaign associated with Moody and Sankey, and also with the opposition, fomented by Dr Begg of Newington, to the proposal for church union, together with its associated Disestablishment campaign. The introduction of hymns and organs into

⁵⁷ *Memoirs of a Highland Gentleman*, ed. G. Henderson (Edinburgh, 1905), 211.

⁵⁸ K. R. Ross, *Church and Creed in Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1988), 133.

⁵⁹ A. A. Maclaren, *Religion and Social Class* (London, 1974), 30.

the worship of the church, and of critical historical study of the Bible into the teaching of the church, have also been identified with Edinburgh.⁶⁰ These influences were not, of course, the monopoly of the south. Indeed the unsettling effect of the Higher Critical movement first came to the attention of the church through the writings of William Robertson Smith during his tenure of the Old Testament Chair in Aberdeen's Free Church College. Following Smith's removal from the chair, his immediate successor, George Adam Smith (1856-1942) was no less influential in the development of Biblical Criticism (albeit in a less unsettling way), both during his first period in Aberdeen (1881-1892) and later during his Principalship of the University (1910-1936).

In parallel with the development of Biblical Criticism, there arose what some churchmen saw as a further challenge to traditional belief. This came from the natural scientists both in respect of the discoveries of geologists and also the hypotheses of the biologists. The form of evolutionary theory associated with Charles Darwin had its debut in 1859 contemporaneously with the commencement of the Second Evangelical Awakening. As it happened, the tenets of Darwinism caused far less controversy in the Highland church than did the work of the revivalists and the failure of the Highland church to campaign against Darwinism with the fervour with which it opposed revivalism, calls for some explanation. According to A. P. F. Sell, Dr Kennedy's silence on Darwinism can be explained by the fact that evolutionary thought had not made its fullest popular impact by the time of his death which was in 1884.⁶¹ However, the public debate on Darwinism began with the Oxford Meeting of the British Association in 1860 and throughout that decade most of the meetings of the British Association were devoted to Darwinism. Charles Hodge took issue with Darwinism in a book published in 1874⁶² but by the end of that decade the public debate had been scaled down.⁶³ Dr Sell's explanation does not therefore fit the facts of the situation.

⁶⁰ C. Simpson, *Principal Rainy* (London, 1909), vol. 1, ch. xv.

⁶¹ A. P. F. Sell, *Defending & Declaring the Faith* (Exeter, 1987), 18.

⁶² C. Hodge, *What is Darwinism?* (New York, 1874).

⁶³ L. Barber, *The Heyday of Natural History* (London, 1980), 282.

A more likely explanation for Kennedy's silence is that he, like Spurgeon, was not seriously concerned with evolutionary theories purporting to describe the development of plant and animal species. Many Calvinists with a high view of God's sovereign purposes had an equally high respect for scientific endeavour and their indifference to evolutionary debate was of a piece with the attitude of earlier evangelicals to the controversy attaching to geology and Creation. With regard both to Darwinism and to the Flood controversies, it was the Calvinists who offered the least opposition.⁶⁴ Possibly these matters did not disturb the Highland church because some of the protagonists in the scientific community were men of standing in the church. Apart from the influential role which Hugh Miller exercised on the church's thinking, there were others (not the least of whom were in Aberdeen) who stressed the intrinsic harmony between natural revelation and special revelation. Among these may be mentioned Dr John Fleming (1785-1857), an ordained minister who held the chair of Natural Philosophy at King's College from 1834. He taught many future ministers of the Highland church to regard the works of God in creation as being a companion volume to the special revelation given by God in Scripture.⁶⁵ William MacGillivray (1796-1852), a Harrisman who became Professor of Natural History at Marischal in 1841, was no less committed than Fleming to discerning the hand of God in the works of creation. In his student days, one of MacGillivray's classmates was Roderick Macleod of Bracadale (1794-1868), the acknowledged leader of the Free Church in Skye. The personal acquaintance which Highland ministers had with these men of science, gave them confidence in the anti-obscurantist views embraced by Hugh Miller.

Nearer to Kennedy's time there was the Rev. James Iverach, a Gaelic speaker from Caithness who, after serving in a pastorate in Aberdeen from 1874, was appointed in 1887 to the chair of Apologetics in Aberdeen's Free Church College and to the Principalship of that College in 1905. During his long stay in Aberdeen, Iverach maintained close links with the

⁶⁴ C.A. Russell, *Cross-currents. Interactions between Science & Faith* (Leicester, 1985), 149.

⁶⁵ A. Mackay, *Life and Times of the Rev George Davidson* (Edinburgh, 1875), 29.

Highland church and he also published several books on aspects of evolution. In these books he sought to defend Christian truth from scientific scepticism while at the same time claiming that Darwin's theory "may be held in such a form as to have no dangerous consequences for philosophy or theology".⁶⁶ In his day Iverach was a major force in the teaching of apologetics and the Highland church did not challenge his attempts to bring about an understanding between science and theology.

In addition to its contribution to the teaching of the church, Aberdeen has also had a role in developing the worship of the church. The *Northern Psalter*, edited by William Carnie, was for long unchallenged as the standard tune-book for the Psalms in metre.⁶⁷ The Aberdeen Ecclesiological Society, the first of its kind in Scotland, founded in 1886 by James Cooper, minister of the East Church of St Nicholas, sought to arouse interest in church furnishings as an expression of doctrine. Cooper, with his Society, was instrumental in introducing into presbyterian buildings, side pulpits, lecterns and prayer desks.⁶⁸ At that time, such innovations were seen to run counter to the whole ethos of the Highland church with its traditional emphasis on austerity and unadorned simplicity. Hymns were viewed in a similar light. In a recently published autobiographical memoir, a former Professor of Church History in Australia, Allan MacDonald Mackillop, a North Uist man who was a student in Aberdeen in the 1880's, recounts how he and some other Highland divinity students strayed into a hymn-singing Congregational church only to take to their heels in horror when handed hymn-books.⁶⁹ One of the students who took flight was Alex Stewart who, as Dr Stewart of Free St Columba's, Edinburgh, was held in high esteem by all branches of the church in Scotland. His aversion to hymns was significantly modified in later life.

One of Dr Stewart's contemporaries in Aberdeen was Donald Munro, a native of Lairg, who, as Dr Munro of Ferintosh and Rogart, was one of the post-1900 Free Church ministers. According to his friend and biographer

⁶⁶ J. R. Moore, *The Post-Darwinian Controversies* (Cambridge, 1981), 253.

⁶⁷ M. Patrick, *Four Centuries of Scottish Psalmody* (London, 1949), 201.

⁶⁸ I. Brady, *Study Rooted in Devotion*, 51.

⁶⁹ A. M. MacKillop, *A Goodly Heritage* (Inverness, 1998), 84.

Principal John Macleod, Donald Munro loved the old ways and clung to them; so much so that when he was a student in Aberdeen he founded a Purity of Worship Association by which he sought to oppose any deviation from the old tradition to which he was so attached.⁷⁰ But it is significant in relation to our theme, that later in life Dr Munro found it possible to participate in leading the worship in King's College Chapel notwithstanding its organs and hymn-books, its lecterns and prayer desks. One of his class-mates, Dr J. M. Bulloch, later referred to the influence which King's College had had on Munro. "He was inspired by more than learning his lessons. He was profoundly moved by being admitted into what he considered the sacred circle of the University, and he never lost the sense of ecstasy it aroused. It came out very movingly when he was asked to read one of the lessons at the ceremony in King's College Chapel at the fiftieth anniversary of the birth of the class in 1934".⁷¹ Munro readily agreed to take part in that act of worship attended by Principal Sir George Adam Smith and former classmates, among whom were six other ministers. Donald Munro, the archetypal highland student who stayed in a beached highland herring boat on the Dee and lived on oatmeal and fish,⁷² had clearly been influenced by his *alma mater*.

The influence of Aberdeen and its university on the Highland church probably declined after 1900 if only because transport links with Glasgow and Edinburgh made the southern universities more readily accessible to Highland students. In addition, in so far as the post-1900 Free Church continued to characterise the religion of the Highlands, students preparing for the Free Church ministry tended to take their Arts degree in Edinburgh preparatory to taking the Free Church course in divinity which was available only in Edinburgh. Even so some Highland students continued to favour Aberdeen for undergraduate studies. One such was John A Mackay, an Invernesian who graduated in 1912 and who in 1916 was ordained to the Free Church ministry to undertake missionary service in Latin America. It was in Aberdeen that his missionary interest was stimulated and his

⁷⁰ J. Macleod, *Donald Munro of Ferintosh and Rogart* (Inverness, 1939), 10.

⁷¹ *Aberdeen University Review* vol. 25 (1937-38), 45.

⁷² Lord Boyd Orr, *As I Recall* (London, 1966), 41.

Presbyterian horizons broadened through contact with the Rev Grant Gibb, minister of Gilcomston Park Baptist Church. In 1936 Mackay was appointed President of Princeton Theological Seminary and from there he played an influential role in the councils of the International Missionary Council, the Presbyterian World Alliance and the World Council of Churches. But his ongoing links with the church in the Highlands where his brother the Rev W R Mackay, also a graduate of Aberdeen, was a highly esteemed minister of the Free Church of Scotland, served to influence the Free Church against adopting an undue exclusivity in relation to other Presbyterian churches.

Down the centuries the natural flow of Highland-Lowland migration, especially from the more thickly populated eastern Highlands, resulted in a sustained movement of highlanders to Scotland's eastern seaboard and notably to Aberdeen.⁷³ Within this general and mostly irreversible population flow, there were many divinity students who subsequently returned to the Highlands as ministers. That these men were influenced by their mentors, the ministers of Aberdeen and the teachers in its universities, is axiomatic. That, after all, is the purpose of education. When therefore due recognition is given to the extent to which the influential ministers of the Highlands were educated in Aberdeen, it must be conceded that in the heyday of its development, the life of the Highland church was shaped more by Aberdeen and its colleges than by those of either Edinburgh or Glasgow. Some instances of the interaction between Aberdeen and the Highland church have been enumerated in this paper but many more remain to be adduced.

Aberdeen

⁷³ C. W. J. Withers, "Highland Migration to Aberdeen, c. 1649-1891" in *Northern Scotland*, 9 (1989), 21-44.

